2005 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

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Combating the risk of nuclear terrorism by reducing the civilian use of highly enriched uranium

Working paper submitted by Iceland, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden

1. The threat of nuclear terrorism constitutes a growing danger to international peace and security, a concern that is reflected in United Nations Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) and the International Convention on the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism (2005). Highly enriched uranium (HEU) is of particular concern in this context, due to the technical feasibility of constructing a crude nuclear explosive device from HEU, making it a possible choice for a terrorist group/non-State actor. This has already been pointed out at this Conference inter alia by IAEA's Director General Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, in his opening address.

2. The highest priority should therefore be given to impede access by non-State actors to HEU. This material can currently be found in a large number of countries around the world. Measures to secure and eliminate HEU are currently under way as part of commendable international initiatives, such as the G-8 Global Partnership and Global Threat Reduction Initiative. Further action, however, is required to reduce the possibility that terrorist groups could gain access to HEU.

3. HEU is not required for the generation of civilian nuclear power. Currently, HEU is used for civilian purposes as a fuel for research and propulsion reactors, in critical assemblies and as the source of certain short-lived isotopes, which are produced by bombarding HEU targets. In most of these cases, however, low-enriched uranium (LEU) can be substituted for HEU, or other techniques can be applied to achieve the required results.

4. In an effort to reduce the dangers of nuclear terrorism, we recommend that this Conference:

(a) Encourage all countries to consider, and if deemed necessary, implement additional measures to protect and control existing HEU stocks;

(b) Express the view that minimizing the use of and commerce in HEU for civilian purposes is desirable, as is the goal of total elimination of HEU in the civilian nuclear sector as soon as technically feasible;

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(c) Encourage all countries to eliminate or commit to converting those civilian HEU-fuelled installations under their control, for which there is a continuing need, to LEU fuels as soon as technically feasible;

(d) Discourage all countries from undertaking or supporting new civilian projects involving HEU fuel other than for the purpose of down-blending that fuel to LEU;

(e) Encourage the IAEA to establish a comprehensive global inventory of HEU in civilian use and to report to the next NPT Review Conference on the progress made in fuel conversion and in the elimination of reactors and critical assemblies internationally.